

St
Martin
in
the
Fields

Charity

Vicar's Relief Fund

Impact Report 2020/21





It is always difficult finding places to live for our service users, as most don't have any savings or a guarantor available. But the help that Vicar's Relief [Fund] gives for rent in advance is invaluable. Without [the VRF], we would not have been able to do 90% of the moves we have done in the past 9 months, [so] we are all very grateful.

Frontline worker, 2020



St Martin-In-The-Fields Charity's aim is that everyone has a place to call home. We support frontline workers across the UK to work with people experiencing homelessness. They work tirelessly to support people to secure, and keep, a safe place to live. We are best known for our annual BBC Radio 4 Christmas Appeal with St. Martin-in-the-Fields. The money we raise directly supports people through The Connection at St. Martin's and across the UK through the Vicar's Relief Fund (VRF) and the Frontline Network.

The VRF helps people experiencing homelessness through small, quick grants that prevent eviction or help with accessing accommodation. We award grants of up to £500, and we usually process grant requests in 3-5 days. We give grants to people across the UK through frontline workers who apply to us on their behalf.



I have used the VRF [...] many times throughout the pandemic and this has allowed me to assist my clients to access both private rented accommodation and social housing. Without this I would have many clients either sleeping on the streets or in temporary accommodation.

Frontline worker, 2020



How we responded to an ever changing year

March 2020

Vicar's Relief Fund (VRF) still running. The country enters lockdown on 26th March. England and Wales issue a moratorium on evictions preventing them from taking place during lockdown (Scotland issued similar legislation in April, Northern Ireland did not legislate against evictions during this time).

Frontline Network Survey

By 30th March, we have received 836 responses to our survey of frontline workers across the UK asking what would be most helpful/needed during the crisis.

April 2020

In response to the survey, we launched the Emergency Fund (EF) on 6th April, with updated grant categories covering Basic Essential Needs (BEN), Overcoming Barriers to Support (OBTS), and Securing Accommodation (SA). More details about these categories can be found in the 'Notes on our Data' section.

May 2020

By the end of May, we had **awarded 1,567 grants** totalling **£505,470**.

Autumn/Winter 2020

Covid cases began to rise across the UK, leading to the reintroduction of lockdowns in many areas. By the end of December, we had **awarded 6,681 grants** totalling **£2,181,848**.

September 2020

We closed the EF, and relaunched VRF. By this point we had **received over 5,000 applications** and awarded **4,649 grants**.

July 2020

Restrictions began to ease. Due to budget and the opening up of services, we closed OBTS and BEN on 23rd July to focus on SA.

February 2021

Due to further lockdowns across the UK, we relaunched the EF and closed VRF.

March 2021

The anniversary of the first lockdown. By this time, we had **awarded 7,837 grants** totalling **£2,801,463**.

Looking forward

Restrictions begin to lift, and so we relaunched VRF on 17th May after closing the EF.

The ban on evictions ends at various times across the UK (except Northern Ireland, where no ban has been in place).

Introduction

Nobody could have predicted what would happen in 2020, which would turn out to be an incredibly challenging year for the world, particularly for people experiencing homelessness. Throughout our history, the Vicar's Relief Fund (VRF) has listened and responded to the needs of those we support across the UK. When lockdown was first announced in March 2020, we consulted with frontline workers across the country. Within 3 weeks we launched the Emergency Fund (EF), providing grants to help with basic essentials, access to support and accommodation for people around the country during a time of global crisis. This diversified and increased our grant offer as previously we had focused on accessing accommodation and preventing eviction. We used learning from this to relaunch the VRF in September of 2020 and, when the UK went back into lockdown, we relaunched the Emergency Fund in February 2021.

Due to this unprecedented time, our data looks different to what we have produced in the past, but we believe it captures a snapshot of the impact we have made over the last year in helping support people away from homelessness.

Methodology

This data is collected via applications submitted to the VRF and Emergency Fund between 6th April 2020 and 31st March 2021.

Unless otherwise stated, this data does not include any applications which were declined, withdrawn or returned to us. Please see 'Notes on our data' for more information regarding this, along with other information regarding data and categories used.

Our year in numbers

Value of all the grants given in 2020-21:

£2,801,463



Number of people helped:
11,684



Many people come to us with no mobile phone or device to access the internet. During the pandemic local services have closed so there are less places to access the internet. Thankfully [...] I have been able to get some funding from VRF to help people access the internet.

Frontline Worker, 2020



Total applications received:

9,055

Total applications awarded:

7,837



Basic
Essential Needs

1,881
awards

Total awarded:
£351,225

Overcoming
Barriers to Support

1,320
awards

Total awarded:
£247,554

Securing
Accommodation

5,187
awards

Total awarded:
£2,202,684

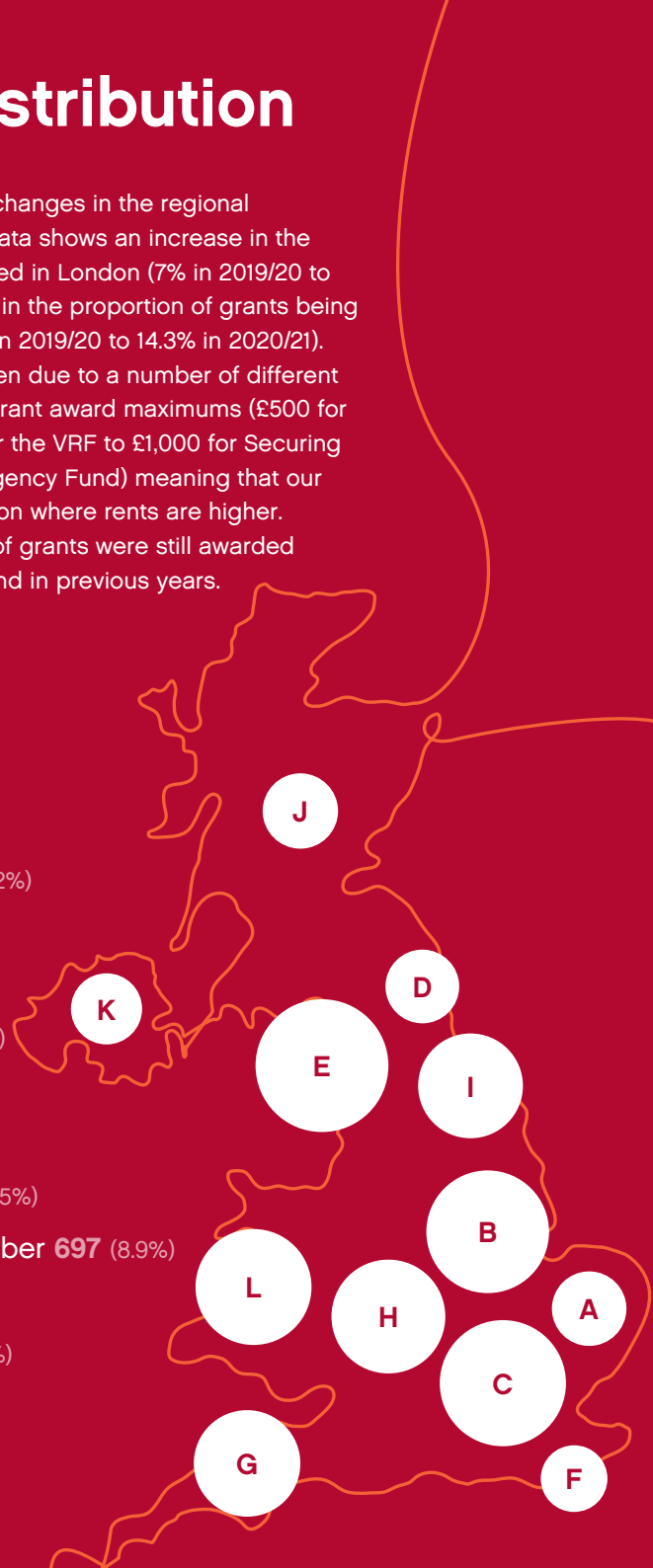
*Several awards can be made per application, so the total awards would be higher than the total of applications awarded.

Regional distribution

Over the last year we have seen changes in the regional distribution of applications. Our data shows an increase in the proportion of grants being awarded in London (7% in 2019/20 to 12.9% in 2020/21) and a decrease in the proportion of grants being awarded in the North West (22% in 2019/20 to 14.3% in 2020/21). We think that this change has been due to a number of different factors, including the increased grant award maximums (£500 for Accessing Accommodation under the VRF to £1,000 for Securing Accommodation under the Emergency Fund) meaning that our grants had greater reach in London where rents are higher. However, the highest proportion of grants were still awarded in the North West as we have found in previous years.

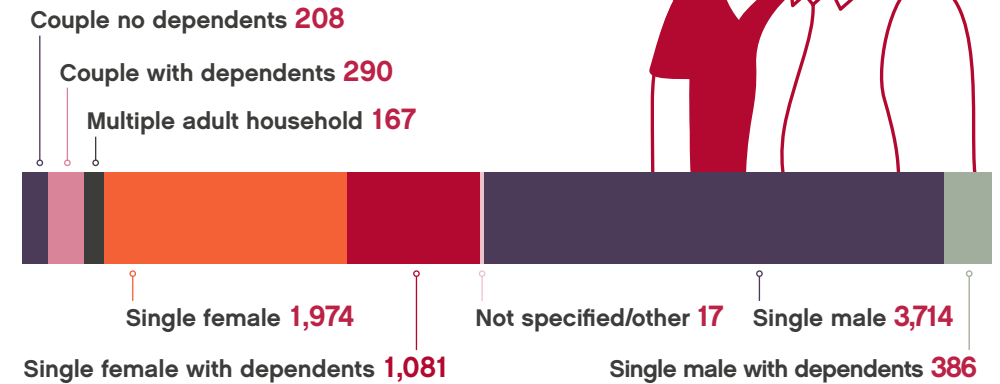
England Total **6,297** (80.3%)

- A. East **352** (4.5%)
- B. East Midlands **956** (12.2%)
- C. London **1,010** (12.9%)
- D. North East **342** (4.4%)
- E. North West **1,120** (14.3%)
- F. South East **279** (3.6%)
- G. South West **722** (9.2%)
- H. West Midlands **819** (10.5%)
- I. Yorkshire and the Humber **697** (8.9%)
- J. Scotland **363** (4.6%)
- K. Northern Ireland **325** (4.1%)
- L. Wales **852** (10.9%)



Beneficiaries

Household circumstances



Support needs

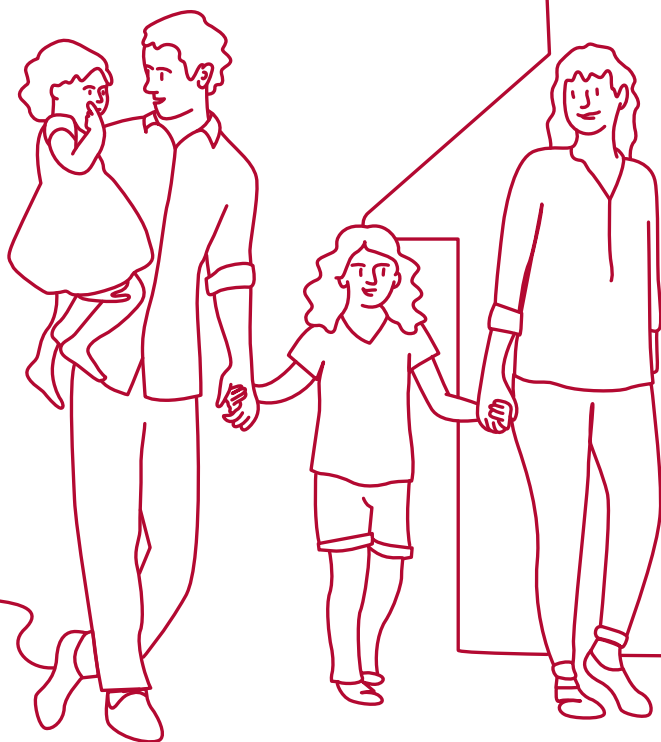
NB: Applicants can select more than one option.

| | | | |
|---|--------------|-----------------------------|------------|
| Mental health | 5,127 | Learning difficulty | 514 |
| Alcohol/substance misuse | 2,404 | No recourse to public funds | 465 |
| Homelessness | 2,266 | Learning disability | 303 |
| Physical health | 1,648 | Older person | 278 |
| In contact with the criminal justice system | 1,587 | Financial abuse | 202 |
| Domestic abuse | 1,295 | Victim of crime | 162 |
| Multiple/complex needs | 1,225 | Autism | 161 |
| Young person | 1,223 | Modern slavery | 54 |
| Physical disability | 656 | Trafficking | 11 |
| Prisoner/probation | 644 | Other | 570 |
| | | None | 326 |

Looking forward

The UK is emerging from the pandemic and it is unclear how the changing needs of those experiencing homelessness will evolve. The lifting of the bans on evictions, in England, Wales and Scotland, the ending of furlough and a potential economic downturn are but three factors that can make life for those experiencing homelessness even more difficult, or increase the numbers of individuals and families at risk of homelessness. We anticipate an increase in the need for grants to help prevent eviction and we will ensure that the VRF continues to evolve to respond to this effectively.

Over the next year we are also committed to improving how we monitor the impact of our grants through collecting feedback from frontline workers and people with experience of homelessness, and we will work toward identifying those groups who are underserved by our grants and making changes to better reach these people.



Notes on our data

Quotes from frontline workers included in this report were collected as part of our Annual Frontline Worker Survey, conducted in November 2020. You can view the full report online: www.frontlinenetwork.org.uk/resources/frontline-worker-survey-2020-report-launched

The Emergency Fund

We made the following changes to our grant categories:

- Basic Essential Needs (household goods, food, electricity and gas, etc)
- Overcoming Barriers to Support (anything which would allow clients to access support remotely, such as laptops, mobile phones and internet access)
- Securing Accommodation (which covered our existing Accessing Accommodation and Preventing Eviction categories)
- Assessors were free to award grants under multiple categories

During the course of the Emergency Fund, we needed to make changes to our criteria to manage expenditure and respond to the changing environment as the UK went beyond the peak of the first Coronavirus wave. From 23rd July we closed the Basic Essential Needs and Overcoming Barriers to Support categories. We then reduced the amount that we would award for the Securing Accommodation category from £1000 to £500 on 5th August. We still considered awards above this limit for exceptional circumstances.

Beneficiaries: This data is based on data collected from the diversity monitoring

form frontline workers are asked to complete before proceeding with an application. This information is stored separately on the system from application data meaning that assessors didn't have access to it when reviewing applications. The figures in this report are calculated using a combination of the data collected from the diversity monitoring form and data from the applications which asks for household circumstances (Single Adult, Single Adult with Dependents, etc).

The data we previously collected on ethnicity, religion, sexuality and gender was not in line with current definitions. We have made recent changes to this so that the data we are now collecting agrees with definitions used by the Office for National Statistics and Stonewall. We make it clear in our application that this data is not used to assess an application, but for us to identify underserved groups so that we might better inform our work in the future.

Support Needs: We changed the VRF support needs options following guidance around terminology used to describe people who are in contact with the criminal justice system. The new list was brought in for the relaunch of the VRF in September 2020, and so some data will be missing for applications submitted before this time. For these funds, *ex-offender* has been used as the figure for *in contact with the criminal justice system*. *Financial abuse, homelessness, trafficking and victim of crime* had no comparable options for these funds and so data is unavailable for applications submitted before September 2020.



The support we have received from VRF and the Emergency Fund has been amazing.

Frontline worker, 2020



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A large white outline of a house with a chimney, positioned on the right side of the page. The outline is simple and minimalist, with a gabled roof and a chimney on the right side. The house is partially cut off by the right edge of the page.